

**International Cooperation in Small Cities:  
New Directions and Innovative Local Practices  
in British Columbia**

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Since the launch of the research project, Michael Simpson, Executive Director, Jennifer Faith Boundy, Laura Barluzzi, and Deborah Glaser of BCCIC have led the project investigation team at BCCIC in various stages.

The members of BCCIC's regional networks in the Comox Valley (Vancouver Island), Nelson (the Kootenays), and Prince George (Northern BC) are acknowledged for their strong support for the development and completion of this research project. A representative of each network participated in the project's steering committee, to guide and to inform the project. These regional representatives also facilitated relationships and connections in support of recruitment for data collection, and for knowledge mobilization within their communities during the project.

Many student research assistants contributed in all phases of the project including drafting the research ethics application, conducting the literature review, note taking in data collection, transcribing interviews and focus groups, and participating in knowledge mobilization activities. We wish to acknowledge the work of James Shawana, Dinah Agyapong, Jeffery Chalifoux, Ashwini Dake, Kit Yee Cheong, and Haorui Wu of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary's Central and Northern Alberta Region (CNAR), led by Dr. Drolet.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this research study is to advance knowledge in international cooperation by exploring the experiences of civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and related stakeholder groups in British Columbia's (BC) small cities and towns

Past research on international cooperation in Canada has focused on large urban centres, with far less attention to small cities and towns. Yet international cooperation NGOs are actively engaged in creating partnerships in many of these communities, including Northern sites, in a long-term and sustainable manner. There is a need to better understand how these local organizations consider their work in a provincial, national, and international context, particularly since the challenges facing international development remain varied and complex.

Field research was undertaken in three communities in British Columbia in order to explore how international cooperation NGOs view their work by investigating meanings and understandings of partnerships, strengths and challenges in small cities and towns; to identify how a small city and town context influences international cooperation NGOs; to enhance, strengthen, and consolidate the partnership among researchers, educators, practitioners, and students as a basis for ongoing collaborative research; to inform the support that the British Columbia Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC) has provided to regional networks across BC over five years (2011-2016); and to advance knowledge of international cooperation strategies by identifying promising practices, policies, and lessons learned. The research objectives were met by conducting qualitative research that involved student researchers and staff in three small cities, and related knowledge mobilization activities.

The study findings represent community members' understanding of the strengths, challenges, promising practices, and innovations of international cooperation NGOs in small cities and towns. Findings were centered around five major themes:

**Connectedness:** individual and group connections are easier to make in small town settings and are often steeped in direct personal relationships that promote trust and partnerships;

**Capacity Building:** education and raising awareness through public engagement, with post-secondary institutions playing a major role, creates opportunities at the local level;

**Local-Global Connection:** local definitions of international development are influenced by local issues and a local interpretation of the role social justice plays in how the connection is understood;

Tools and Strategies for Community Action: the internet and social media, community activities, and fundraising play big roles in supporting and amplifying international cooperation efforts in small towns; and

Community Challenges: small town practitioners often feel cut off from resources and opportunities due to their size and location.

These findings aim to improve the capacity of organizations to learn from their experiences and to share their lessons with others. It is anticipated that a number of stakeholders will be interested in the result of this study including government policy-makers, education and training institutions, community organizations, NGOs, development practitioners, and members of the general public.

The resulting research report provides an introduction to the study, research methodology, a comprehensive literature review, thematic analysis of the findings, and a number of appendices (including the interview and focus group questions, bibliography, and summaries of the academic and grey literature reviews). Further outputs include two briefs of the research findings to be provided to small communities and policy makers, a plain language summary of the research, a blog post on the BCCIC website, and a forthcoming journal article in the Canadian Journal of Development Studies. Furthermore, BCCIC presented the research at the CASID 2015 and 2016 conferences and the research findings at the 2016 World Social Forum.

## INTRODUCTION

Past research on international cooperation in Canada has focused on large urban centers, with far less attention to small cities and towns. Yet international cooperation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are actively engaged in creating partnerships in many of these communities, including Northern sites, in a long-term and sustainable manner. There is a need to better understand how these local organizations consider their work in a provincial, national, and international context, particularly since the challenges facing international development remain varied and complex. Creating new knowledge and innovation is important in order to address these challenges, including inequality, poverty, environmental degradation, and gender inequities (International Development Research Centre, 2009).

In this study our definition of small cities and towns are those with populations between 10,000 and 90,000. Field research was conducted in the Comox Valley (Vancouver Island), Nelson (the Kootenays), and Prince George (Northern BC), where the BC Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC) has been engaged in regional programming for at least a five year period (2008-2013). BCCIC developed a regional network support program for international cooperation NGOs based on needs expressed during previous CIDA-funded programming (2008-2011) and member surveys.

Studies have examined the unique strengths and challenges of rural Canadian communities, such as the Rural Women Making Change coalition, the Canadian Rural Partnerships Program, and the Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute. Yet rural needs are different from those of small cities and towns, and this reality was the impetus to conduct research from the perspectives of NGOs within this context. Documenting the realities of small town international cooperation NGOs is important research, as it values and raises awareness of the strengths of these organizations and their communities. This research contributes to enhancing and strengthening relationships between urban and small town organizations by recognizing common and dissimilar situations. It also allows capacity-building programs, such as those implemented by BCCIC and its sister Councils across Canada, to more effectively address the needs of international cooperation NGOs in small cities, where lessons learned can be applied across regions. This locally-defined research priority was identified in broad consultations throughout BC with partners, stakeholders, and regional networks.

The study builds on an existing community-university partnership that aims to enhance collaboration between universities and BCCIC while building on their complementary international development and cooperation skills and experience. New research initiatives are emerging through community-university partnerships in international development that brings together post-secondary institutions and partners from community and NGO sectors. It is anticipated that the lessons learned from community-based international cooperation

strategies may inform future programming in BC and in other small cities across Canada. The results of the study will contribute to improving our understanding of regional programming and to support Canadians' public engagement in the field of international cooperation and international development.

### **Research Goal and Objectives**

The goal of the study is to advance knowledge in international cooperation by exploring the experiences of NGOs in British Columbia's (BC's) small cities and towns.

The research objectives are:

- 1) To explore how international cooperation NGOs consider their work by investigating meanings and understandings of partnerships, strengths, and challenges in small cities and towns;
- 2) To identify how a small city or town context influences international cooperation NGOs;
- 3) To advance knowledge of international cooperation strategies by compiling case studies on promising practices, policies, and lessons learned.
- 4) To enhance, strengthen, and consolidate the partnership among researchers, educators, practitioners, and students as a basis for ongoing collaborative research; and
- 5) To inform the support BCCIC has provided to regional networks across BC over the last three years (2011-2014).

### **Research Questions**

The overall research question guiding the study is the following

- What are the experiences of NGOs engaged in international cooperation in the context of British Columbia's small cities and towns?

A number of related sub-questions include:

- How do NGOs consider their work in a provincial, national, and international context?

- What are the strengths and challenges of regional programming and contributions to Canadians' public engagement in the field of international development?
- What innovative and promising practices are being used or promoted in small cities and towns?
- How can small city and towns NGOs be supported to deal with the varied and complex challenges facing international development?
- What are the differences, if any, between small cities and towns and urban metropolis centres with respect to international development priorities and issues? How are funding constraints addressed?

### **MEMBERS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM**

Michael Simpson is the Executive Director of BCCIC and Project Leader for this research project. He is a current director of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) and currently manages through BCCIC the Inter-Council Network (ICN) of eight Provincial and Regional Councils. Prior to working for BCCIC, Michael was the Executive Director of One Sky – The Canadian Institute for Sustainable Living, where he led major bilateral projects in West Africa and Latin America on projects ranging from forest conservation to leadership development. Simpson is an active voice for Canadian civil society at international forums ranging from the World Summit on Sustainable Development to UN meetings on renewable energy.

Dr. Julie Drolet, Principal Investigator for this project, is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary and Adjunct Professor at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC. She brings many years of international cooperation experience to the project, including international research, teaching and learning, field education, and community-university partnerships in research. She is a former elected member of the board of directors of BCCIC, and maintains an active research program in the field of international social development.

BCCIC's purpose is to support, strengthen, and promote the international development sector in BC. The Council provides capacity-building and networking programs, as well as public engagement initiatives. BCCIC has established an innovative program supporting regional networks across BC over the last three years prior to the launch of this project. BCCIC is also a member of the Inter-Council Network (ICN), a coalition of the seven Provincial and Regional



Councils for International Cooperation across Canada. The ICN's mandate is to build the capacity of the Councils and, by extension, their members. This research provided an opportunity for BCCIC to consider in a more effective manner how to address small town organizations' needs, to inform regional network programming, and to share knowledge with the ICN to further other Councils' support of small city and town organizations.

Due to BCCIC's small size (three full-time staff and one part-time staff by June 2014), a research coordinator was recruited to manage project activities. Deborah Glaser (2014), Jennifer Faith Boundy (2015), and Laura Barluzzi (2016) were responsible for project coordination, communication with the project's steering committee, data collection for the field research and knowledge mobilization. Under the guidance of the Research Coordinator, students from the University of British Columbia assisted with literature reviews and other project efforts.

Collaborators in the project include BCCIC's regional networks in Comox Valley (Vancouver Island), Nelson (the Kootenays), and Prince George (Northern BC). The Regional Coordinators or other members from each of these regional networks sat on the project steering committee, in order to guide, inform, and support the project. They included Colleen Hanley in Comox Valley, Karoline Kemp in Nelson, and Catherine Kendall in Prince George. These representatives facilitated relationships and connections for recruitment in data collection, and knowledge mobilization within their communities during the project.

The project researchers and collaborators have links with leading Canadian institutions such as IDRC, the Association of Universities and Community Colleges (AUCC), the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), relevant Canadian learned societies (CASID), universities and colleges (University of Calgary, Thompson Rivers University, College of New Caledonia, North Island College, Selkirk College), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Student research assistants were involved in all phases of the study. The student research assistants and interns provided valuable contributions with the research ethics application, review of the literature review, note taking in data collection, transcription of interview and focus groups, and supported knowledge mobilization activities.

## **PARTNERSHIP APPROACH**

The partnership brings together community and university researchers from across BC as well as practitioners and educators. The project directly contributed to the Canadian Partnerships Program's identified outcome areas of:

- Increased contribution of Canadian collaborative research and knowledge to policy and practice of development actors; and
- Improved capacity of Canadian institutions to learn from their experiences and to share lessons with others.

A key feature of this partnership includes a program of research that utilizes community-based regional networks to address local and international interests. Knowledge mobilization activities are designed to have a provincial and national reach through the BCCIC networks and by sharing the findings in national conferences organized by the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID) conference.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research methodology was adopted to collect information from individuals, organizations, and groups in three distinct sites who are engaged in international cooperation in small cities and towns: 1) Comox Valley (Vancouver Island); 2) Nelson (the Kootenays); and 3) Prince George (Northern BC).

In these communities, where the social and economic situations differ from each other, there is a need to learn from those engaged in international cooperation activities. In each site the researchers sought to identify what contextual factors contribute and influence international cooperation. Key questions explored in each site focused on how social capital, human capital, and social networks are utilized, as well as how social solidarity, social cohesion, and social interaction in international cooperation is enhanced.

A thorough review of academic peer-reviewed publications was conducted by a doctoral student research assistant at the University of Calgary. In early 2016 the grey literature was reviewed by the BCCIC research coordinator. Numerous academic databases and internet search engines were consulted with the guidance of a university librarian. Summaries of the literature reviewed and a bibliography were developed by the student research assistant and current research coordinator in order to ground the study in the relevant literature. Some of these findings were circulated among the members of the research team for their input.

During the 2016 winter-spring period, a group of four students from the University of British Columbia assisted the research coordinator in finding relevant grey literature. Furthermore, the students helped by creating a database of small cities and towns in BC with NGOs focusing on international cooperation work. Within the database, 24 organizations were researched.

Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in each site with key informants in the community including community leaders, advocates, educators, and project coordinators from the international development community. In addition, focus group meetings were organized with local residents and volunteers in order to learn about their strengths and challenges in the context of a small city. Regional members of the steering committee provided assistance with the recruitment of research participants using existing networks in each community. The research coordinator hired by BCCIC conducted five individual interviews and one focus group discussion in each community; the total sample comprised 15 interviews and three focus groups. While it was anticipated that 8-12 participants would be involved in each focus group, there was a range from 3-8 participants per session. Focus group sessions were facilitated by the research coordinator and the regional committee representative from each respective community, and a local student research assistant participated as a note taker.

The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder. The recordings were transcribed by student research assistants for the purposes of data analysis. Each transcript was carefully read multiple times. A grounded theory approach was adopted to guide data analyses and interpretations using open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for developing categories and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The qualitative research software Nvivo 10.0 was used to code the transcripts, support analysis of the data, and to explore the relationships between the codes. Qualitative research software provides flexibility in data analysis to allow for changes in conceptualization and organization as the project develops. Transcripts were coded line-line-by-line to identify concepts and thinking about the meanings grounded in the data. A qualitative approach proved to be a suitable method in order to conduct this exploratory research and to learn from the perspectives and experiences of individuals actively engaged in international cooperation activities in small cities.

The research partnership brought together all members of the project team together for a meeting in the first year to launch the project, and to discuss the research questions. Members of the steering committee were consulted and provided input into the development of the interview and focus group questions for the study, presented on their prior work with communities in each site, and supported the recruitment of participants in the data collection phase. In year two the project continued with data collection and analysis. Knowledge mobilization activities were ongoing throughout the lifetime of the project.

## **Limitations and Risks**

In the funding proposal for this project one of the risks identified was the potential major risk that the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) funding would not be

confirmed for BCCIC in the next five year program period. The project faced a major constraint when DFATD funding was delayed, resulting in the layoffs of all BCCIC staff. In addressing this risk, there was a delay in the start of the project. Further, the study relied on the availability of university-based resources to support data collection, transcription, analysis, and knowledge mobilization activities on a voluntary basis. This further presented a number of risks due to delays in fund transfer payments to cover the expenses of the student research assistants. Finally, re-organized support for the regional networks and relationships was required, and as a result, the research coordinator was unable to recruit participants from Kamloops, BC, as agreed upon in the initial research proposal. Despite these risks experienced by the project and the limitations associated with them, there are rich experiences and perspectives that have emerged in the analysis of the results.

There are a number of limitations associated with this exploratory and qualitative research study. First, the lack of prior research on the topic is a limiting factor. This is evident based on the results of the literature review. The study sought to address this gap in the academic and grey literature by conducting exploratory qualitative research. Second, a limitation of the study is the small, non-probability sample of convenience. Thus, it is not possible to generalize the results of the study. Third, the study relied on self-reported data that cannot be independently verified. Finally, the study relied on access to individuals and organizations with the support of the regional networks in each community. Another limitation was that data collection and analysis were performed by different members of the project team. A research coordinator travelled to each community for the purposes of collecting data, and the principal researcher conducted the analysis as previously discussed earlier in this section of the report.

Despite the limitations and risks associated with this research project, the methods allowed for rich qualitative data to emerge on the small city and town context, and the perspectives and experiences of those engaged in international cooperation work in this exploratory study. Due to staffing and funding constraints, it was not possible for the steering committee to convene beyond the first meeting.

## **RESEARCH ETHICS**

Research ethics approval was obtained by the principal investigator (Dr. Julie Drolet) with the University of Calgary's Research Ethics Board prior to data collection. The research coordinators at BCCIC completed the TCPS 2 tutorial course on research ethics (CORE). All participants were invited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. Participants in the study were asked to share their perspectives and experiences in small cities and towns in an interview or focus group. A guide for interviews and focus groups was developed to query participants on the

nature of international development and cooperation, impact of current policies, trends, and shifting demographics, and their experiences in the international development and cooperation sector. Participants were asked about their work mandate, and the nature of their interactions with other groups.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and only members of the research team had access to the audio recordings from the interview and focus groups.

All information was stored in locked cabinets and password-protected computers by the research team and by the principal investigator at the University of Calgary. Participants were informed that the data from the project will be kept for approximately five years in accordance with research ethics protocols. After this period, the electronic files will be deleted, and hard copies of data will be shredded. Participants were advised that copies of the results of the study, upon its completion, could be obtained by contacting the principal investigator, Dr. Julie Drolet, by email or telephone.

Participants signed a consent form that was designed for the project. Participants understood that their signature on the consent form indicated that they understand the information regarding this research project, including all procedures and the personal risks involved, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the project as a subject. Participants' identity and any identifying information obtained is kept confidential. Further, participants were informed that they could refuse to participate or withdraw participation in the project at any time without consequence, and could decline to answer any and all questions, and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

### **SETTING THE STAGE**

A group of four students from the University of British Columbia worked on the research project between February and April 2016. They worked as a team to address the following specific questions:

1. How many small cities and towns are in BC?
2. How many international cooperation NGOs operate in BC's small cities and towns?
3. Do they produce grey literature (e.g. reports)?
4. What are their main activities, practices and missions?

## **THE DATABASE**

In order to answer the first two questions, the research coordinator and the students created a database with the following information:

1. Name of the small cities and towns;
2. Name of each international cooperation organization;
3. Website of each international cooperation organization if available.

This database is a useful and necessary tool for having an overview of international cooperation NGOs in BC's small cities and towns. Applying the definition of a small city or town as one with a population between 10,000 and 90,000, they found approximately 45 small cities and towns in British Columbia. However, certain cities in the Lower Mainland in close proximity to Vancouver, while technically falling within the 10,000-90,000 definition, were excluded from the final study sample based on the students' reasoning that the experiences of those towns would be significantly different from those small cities and towns that cannot easily access Vancouver. Similarly, Victoria has been excluded by the category since it is the political capital.

As a result, the database presents 42 of BC's small cities and towns. Furthermore, for each of the cities and towns in the database there is a list of local NGOs and groups working on international cooperation. By calculating the average, there are about five international cooperation organizations per BC small city and town. However, it is important to note the relatively large difference in size that occurs within the sample; for example, some of the smallest cities (e.g. Quesnel and Williams Lake) appear to not have any organizations while there are about 20 international cooperation organizations in larger cities such as Nanaimo.

## **ONLINE ANALYSIS**

After building the database, the students conducted a grey literature review based on materials produced by some organizations in the database. Unfortunately, very few resources were found and proved that these organizations tend not to produce reports. The students therefore took a sample of 24 organizations in the database and conducted online research. They analysed websites, blogs and newsletters to understand the practices, the activities and the identity of the organizations.

The online research of the 24 organizations found some commonalities, including:

1. The lack of updated information or of a website: about six organizations did not have an active website or did not provide clear information about their activities. This means

that about one fourth of these organizations do not use online tools to their full potential.

2. The high presence of churches and their unclear involvement in international projects: For example, the Sooke Baptist Church is clearly involved internationally as proven by their partnership with a local church in Colombia in 2016. However, the Bread of Life Centre provides information regarding foreign and internal affairs through The Bread Life magazine but it is unclear from their website if they actively do international work.
3. The presence of small branches of a bigger organization (e.g. the Mercy economic development international Canada corporation in Saanichton);
4. The presence of cultural exchange programs (e.g. the Reflections of Fantasy Dance Society in Sooke);
5. City-to-city twinning program: For example, the Port Alberni International Twinning Society (Port Alberni, Canada and Abashiri, Japan) and the Victoria and Khabarovsk Association (between Victoria and Khabarovsk, Russia).

While trying to understand the experiences of these organizations, the students highlighted the difficulty of separating a local focus from an international focus. Some of the organizations appear to have a predominant focus in local activities, but they also appear to be involved in international cooperation through specific projects and fundraising events.

The inclusion and contribution of the UBC students was successful and it strengthened the research goal to include multiple stakeholders and to partner with students and academic institutions.

Jenny Patterson, their professor, confirmed to the research coordinator that the students themselves learned a lot from the internship at the BCCIC. Specifically, she said:

In marking their final reflections (both videos and more detailed reflective writings) the lessons they learned both about civil society and about the realities of working in the 'real world' were very powerful. The personal transformation by some of the students was actually quite striking and the feedback on the support offered by BCCIC has been just so positive.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The results of the literature review found a dearth of published academic peer-reviewed and grey literature on international cooperation in small cities and towns. Specifically, there were only two academic articles located on international cooperation in small cities and towns written by Hewitt (2002, 2004). Similarly, only two grey literature resources focused on small cities and towns and they were written by Tacoli (2004) and Terry and Jarnagin (2010). Hewitt at the time of the publication was a professor of sociology and associate vice-president of research at the University of Western Ontario. Both of Hewitt's articles focused on city-to-city cooperation. Hewitt's (2002) article is an analysis of municipal partnerships and what contributes to their success or failure. Hewitt (2002) adopted a case study approach of two different city-to-city partnerships. One between Charlesbourg in Quebec with a population of 71,000 and Ovalle in Chile with a population of 85,000. The other partnership is between Kitimat in BC with a population of 11,000 and Riobamba in Ecuador with a population of 103,000. The second article by Hewitt (2004) focused on the Charlesbourg and Ovalle partnership. Hewitt's (2004) article investigates "how international cooperation may facilitate enhanced citizen participation in local-decision making in the region" (p. 619). It should be noted that Hewitt (1999a) has other articles on city-to-city cooperation of larger cities between Toronto and São Paulo. As well as an article by Hewitt (1999b) about assessing the impact of municipal internationalism for cities and towns involved in comprehensive types of global interchange. Hewitt (2000) has also published an article about small and intermediate urban centres and international cooperation between Canadian cities and their partners in five Latin American countries. Most recently Hewitt (2004) wrote about a 20-year retrospective of Canada's municipal linkages in the Americas. The findings of Hewitt's research will be incorporated later on in the discussion of the literature review. Cecilia Tacoli (2004), the principal researcher at the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), wrote a paper on the role that small and intermediate urban centres play in promoting rural poverty reduction. The paper of Terry and Jarnagin (2010) analyzed the social responsibility of businesses operating in small cities advanced the idea that the size of the city affects the work of local businesses and their social responsibility.

While there was limited published literature found on this topic, the researchers recognize that additional articles may exist written in languages other than English. Therefore, this literature review is composed of literature surrounding the research topic that may be interrelated and provides insight into international cooperation in small cities and towns. Initial literature reviews looked at the context of small cities and towns as an overarching theme. Emerging themes for this literature review include NGOs regarding social justice, geography, funding, strengths, and changes. The next related theme is about city-to-city cooperation as it demonstrates international cooperation more so between cities. City-to-city international



cooperation has affected policy and also provides lessons for success or failure for international cooperation in small cities and towns.

## **Small Cities and Towns**

References to small cities were mostly general and an international standardized categorization of small cities is missing. For instance, both the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) (2014) and the United Nations (UN) (2001) defined a city in their framework as a broader abstract concept that could be translated as 'local authority,' no matter the size. Specifically, the FCM (2014: 2) believes that cities of all sizes are a key agent of change mainly due to their "profound understanding of the assets and resources communities can mobilize."

The UN report stated that "the term 'cities' is also frequently used loosely in international contexts." The absence of an international standardized way to categorize cities by dimension may be caused by the challenge of defining 'small' and 'big' in absolute terms that apply across geographic and economic scope. In this regard, Tacoli (2004) advance the idea that it is problematic to create a standardized category of 'small cities and intermediated urban centres.' She claims that in different geographic locations the category would be differently perceived, since in many Latin American and European countries a small city is considered having a threshold of 2,000-2,500 inhabitants, while other nations use much higher thresholds. In order to overcome the problem, she suggests categorizing 'small cities' by their functional purposes, services and economic roles within the larger state.

However, small cities were considered by two authors as unique environments. The proximity of small cities to communities was stressed by Terry and Jarnagin (2010). One of their main findings was that the obligation of business management to work for community and societal betterment is proportional to the size of the business and the size of the city in which they are based. For this reason, the size of towns is a key intermediary variable between the size of a business and the level of social performance. As a result of "their greater embeddedness and visibility, small business owners in small towns are likely to conform to the local patterns of civic engagement" (p. 3). Although their study was conducted on for-profit businesses, it can be assumed that the greater visibility in small cities may affect the experiences of local NGOs in a similar way.

Tacoli (2004) conducted a study to discuss the potential role of small and intermediate urban centres in regional and rural development. She supports the idea that small cities have a potential positive role in promoting local development. Specifically, she provided four ways in

which they contribute (Tacoli, 2004: 4-5): 1) by acting as centres of demand/markets for agricultural produce; 2) by acting as centres for the production and distribution of goods and services to their rural regions; 3) by becoming centres for the growth and consolidation of rural non-farm activities and employment; and 4) by attracting rural migrants.

Small cities and towns are facing unique challenges. The FCM (2014: 2) stated that the main challenges faced by any city worldwide is the “shortages of resources.” According to Tacoli (2004), small cities face bigger challenges than big urban centres. For example, she emphasized the need to address the “real risk that the process of globalisation may lead to the justification of a new concentration of activities in the large cities” (Tacoli, 2004: 24). Furthermore, she highlighted the need for policies to focus more on small cities as a bridging force between peripheral needs and international networks. Finally, Goldschmidt (1998, in Terry and Jarnagin 2010), believes that there is the risk for small cities to disappear. This could cause problems as it would lead to a great absence of community-based feelings and historic values.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

NGOs are engaged in creating international partnerships in small cities and towns in BC. The topic of NGOs can be a rather large literature review in itself, but the intent for this study is to provide some insight about what can be learned and applied for NGOs in BC. The history of NGOs “as we have seen, the initial ‘rise of NGOs’ was partly based on their assumed ability to fill gaps in service-delivery as well as their ability to challenge unequal relationships and pursue transformative agendas through their people centered approaches” (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015, p. 710). NGOs have further grown due to the,

Greater numbers of opportunities for political access and participation in international policy-making processes has inspired the formation of new groups and has given them the chance to survive as organizations since access to decision makers can provide groups the influence and legitimacy they need to justify and/or maintain their existence. (Reimann, 2006, p. 55)

Pluijm and Melissen (2007) suggest that there are new non-state regimes of political, social and economic power as response to the fact that “globalization has worn down the state’s responsibilities and functions” (p. 8). Similarly, Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015) highlighted that “rapid globalization and the spread of market liberalizing reforms across the Global South have led to the increasing influence of non-state actors on development policy and practice” (p. 707). NGOs used to be based in the Global North but with changes and growth in the world have led to NGOs also existing in the Global South. The growth of international NGOs has grown

with the expansion of the international system as a result of both a product and a source of world culture (Reimann, 2006).

### Social justice

NGOs face diverse challenges including social justice and legitimacy. Edwards (1999a) contends NGOs face a mixture of poverty, inequality, social exclusion, and violence within and between societies. As well, “serious questions are being raised about the ability of NGOs to meet their long-term goals of social justice and transformation at a time when the developmental sector is narrowly focused on short-term results and value for money” (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015, p. 707). Ebrahim (2003) raised a further concern in questioning the legitimacy of NGOs in representing the poor or marginalized people, as most NGOs are neither membership organizations nor elected bodies. Furthermore, NGOs provide aid in assisting the poor and might not advocate for change as some developmental models “assume that poverty can be eliminated by increased access to resources that have little impact on the underlying structures and processes that underpin unequal access in the first place” (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015, p. 710).

NGOs are accountable to their donors and funders but also need to be accountable to the local communities in which they operate. Keese and Argudo (2006) contend there are issues of legitimacy for NGOs as there are not elected and are only accountable to their donors. Ebrahim (2003) stated some NGOs are not downward accountable to the people and communities in which they operate, but are upward accountable to their donors and funders. Keese and Argudo (2006) contend that NGOs and municipalities working together might provide legitimacy and accountability, as the NGOs in this partnership, are viewed as being democratic, transparent, and accountable, while the municipality benefits from the knowledge and funding provided by the NGO. Also the UN (2001, p. 19) advocates for joined actions between NGOs and cities as NGOs are believed to be “key partners of the city authorities in assessing local communities’ needs.” Banks, Hulme, and Edward (2015) would caution “by aligning more closely with governments, NGOs risk being drawn further way from their intended beneficiaries” (p.712) and the needed “awareness of the dangers and politics of co-option is therefore critical” (p. 712).

### Geography

Challenges faced by international NGOs as stated by Edward, Hulme, and Wallace (1999) are three interrelated sets of changes including economic globalization, the reform of foreign aid, and the evolution of southern NGO’s as major actors in their own right. Campfens (1996)

believes northern NGOs are competing for funds with the view that 'they know best' and are based upon western concepts of development. In addition, Edwards (1999a) stated that NGOs are based in industrialized societies and should not operate in other people's societies. However, Campfens (1996) believes northern NGOs have a role in educating northern communities about 'Third World' issues and advocating for social justice for southern NGOs with the establishment of more direct and equal partnerships between northern and southern communities. NGOs in the Global South have been created with the assistance and support of Northern NGOs. Edwards (1999a) supported that aid is now flowing directly to Southern NGOs as their capacity has been developed and believes now is the time to eliminate northern NGOs as intermediaries. Where past NGO partnerships between North-South partnerships have been highly unequal and paternalistic, Edwards (1999a) further contends a change to a world of equal partnerships and nonfinancial relationships may make it difficult for NGOs to adapt.

### Funding

The Government of Canada is a major funder of 'development' initiatives and programming. According to Campfens (1996) the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has changed its development funding from helping the world's poorest nations to opening markets in developing countries for Canadian goods. Edwards (1999b) believes there has been a change in international cooperation that had focused on funding for foreign aid to a wider agenda to fit the realities of globalization. Edwards (1999) stated some NGOs are treating development as a commodity and being 'businesslike'. Keese and Argudo (2006) would contend against Edwards that NGOs have been funding the gaps left by ineffective government and bring badly needed resources. As well, NGOs since the late 1990s moved away from capital-intensive projects and placed a higher priority on human development (Keese & Argudo, 2006). Furthermore, Edwards (1999) shared a further challenge is that NGOs have to be competitive in both the commercial marketplace and the political process.

### Strengths

Keese and Argudo (2006) stated NGOs act as intermediaries as they provide links between governments, donors, other NGOs, and local communities. Reimann (2006) would support this as the role of NGOs offered an ideal alternative channel for aid because of their ability to reach poor communities, their cost-effective, flexible, and innovative approach in problem solving. As well, Keese and Argudo (2006) believe NGOs can contribute to the capacity building of local governments through their experience in local-level planning; as they know how to organize meetings, encourage citizen participation, and prepare documents. In addition, NGOs provide a valuable linkage outside local areas for municipalities with connections to other parts of the

world (Keese & Argudo, 2006). Overall, NGOs can provide specialist support, advice, knowledge, funding, and connection as an intermediary (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015).

### Changes

NGOs continually face challenges and need to adapt and change. NGOs need to make incremental changes according to Edwards (1999a), such as developing codes of conduct to strengthen accountability, involvement of partners, and increased investment in institutional learning. Ebrahim (2003) would support the process of developing a code of conduct that has been developed by some organizations such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Keese and Argudo (2006) believe NGOs can be accountable if they work through municipalities with participatory budgeting decisions in public meetings. As well, a case study by Keese and Argudo (2006) about a local health centre would support Edwards claim that NGOs need to be based in their own country to be effective. As stated earlier, there is a need for not only upward accountability, but also downward accountability (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015; Ebrahim, 2003)

The issue of geography and subsequent accountability can be addressed with changes and adaptations. As Edwards (1999a) contended that some NGOs call themselves

International, but are governed from a single country in Europe or North America; they talk constantly about partnership, but rarely practice it in their relationships with NGOs in other parts of the world; and their nongovernmental status sits uneasily with the large grants most of them receive from official aid agencies and their unwillingness to confront deep-rooted questions of politics and power. (p. 25)

Campfens (1996) would go further for NGOs and change the relationship amongst NGOs, as they must “move beyond the usual North-South directions to include building South-South and South-North partnerships” (p. 202). This means a change in the one-way directional approach for international development. Furthermore, international development has “imposed by western conceptions of development and interest, ignoring vast differences in culture, social structure and political systems” (Campfens, 1996, p. 206).

In addition, Keese and Argudo believe “NGOs will have to give up some control and become more transparent while finding a balance between accountability to their donors, taking direction from local governments, and working with groups that might oppose those governments” (2006, p. 124) Banks, Hulme, and Edward (2015) call for a shift with NGOs and civil society “from unequal relationships to favoring those with power and resources to equal

partnerships placing local organizations at the center of their priorities” (p. 714). Similarly, M’Bassi (2004) suggests that Northern actors involved in international development in Africa should focus on strengthening local development, local governments and the engagement with local civil society. NGOs can have a great benefit when they “collaborate with municipal governments, their vast local experience becomes an asset” (Keese & Argudo, 2006, p. 125). As mentioned earlier, Banks, Hulme, and Edward (2015) cautioned about political co-option. Reimann (2006) would further support this as not all people view governments as trustworthy and reliable as,

Wary of giving too much to governments in the developing world, unwilling to greatly expand the United Nation’s operational capacity, and not always willing to expand their own bureaucratic and operational infrastructure, donor states have turned to service NGOs as a solution for implementing aid and providing relief in humanitarian crises. (p. 64)

Banks, Hulme, and Edward (2015) state that NGOs could act as bridging organizations that position themselves in a supportive role to local member-based organizations. As cooperation with governments might marginalize people and have little ownership by local people, the inclusion of member-based organizations allows for the inclusion of grassroots linkages (Banks, Hulme, & Edward, 2015).

### **City-to-City Cooperation**

The focus of this literature review is on international cooperation in small cities and towns that can include international cooperation between cities. De Villers (2008) stated, “it can be argued that there are many similarities between C2C [city-to-city] partnerships and alliance relationships between organizations” (p. 150). Buis stated, “from an historical perspective most of the city-to-city cooperation’s were initiated by local governments in developed countries” (2009, p. 191). However, this has meant in some cases that the developed countries determined the content of the city-to-city cooperation, which can be construed as a form of colonialism. Buis defined city-to-city cooperation as “meaning that at least two local government bodies in different countries cooperate in a more or less official framework” (2009, p. 191). The UN (2001, p. 6) defined city-to-city cooperation as “all possible forms of relationship between local authorities at any level in two or more countries which are collaborating together over matters of mutual interest .” The leaders of cities, the mayors, also influence city-to-city partnerships. Baldersheim and Swianiewicz (2002) stated a better-

educated mayor was an important factor for facilitating the development of city-to-city partnerships.

City-to-city partnerships are not always beneficial to all citizens as there can be the “deliberate exclusion or marginalization of social and community groups from active friendship city events” (Jayne, Hubbard, & Bell, 2012, p. 11). Cities may not also benefit as the city in the developed country may believe they have achieved a balanced relationship, however it is based on their own motive and gain. Motives for establishing city-to-city partnerships can vary from solving problems, opportunities, locations, politics, or institutional factors according to Baldersheim and Swianiewicz (2002). For instance, M’Bassi (2004) states that the motives driving African local governments to engage in North-South city-to-city cooperation should be based on the need to strengthen local capacity building rather than on access to funding. Specifically, M’Bassi (2004, p. 5) said that:

It must be said, though, that we still have a long way to go. Many instances of MIC [city-to-city cooperation] are still linked with humanitarian concerns and end up as polite exchanges between mayors and senior officials culminating in the transfer of collected money or old materials, like books and trucks. I say to the African governments that MIC is not a funding channel.

### Foreign Policy

City-to-city cooperation has resulted in partnerships across the globe in various geographic locations, such as North-North, North-South, South-South based upon different thematic focuses (De Villers, 2008). Baldersheim and Swianiewicz (2002) stated the political upheavals in Europe such as the end of the Cold War have reached down to local levels creating fundamental ways of re-orientations in patterns of cooperation. Jayne, Hubbard, and Bell (2012) articulated with cities becoming involved in international partnerships, this can lead to municipalities becoming involved in foreign policy that has been the responsibility of national governments. The national government of the Netherlands “commissioned a report in 2004 which outlined important guidelines for reshaping national policy towards the support and funding of Dutch city partnerships with the South” (Bontenbal, 2010, p. 464). Local governments have been increasingly recognized as important actors in development, viewed as important institutions with good governance at a local level, and can be important partners in North-South city networking (Bontenbal, 2010). The study of Pluijm and Melissen (2007) suggests that a multitude of actors engage in different manners in contemporary diplomacy. The authors demonstrate the growing role of cities in this “multilayered diplomatic environment” (p. 9). For example, one of their findings shows that “cities seem to participate in

almost every stage of international politics” (p. 33), despite contemporary city-to-city cooperation being in its infancy.

In Canada, funding for city-to-city partnerships was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency to promote capacity building in partner cities (Hewitt, 2011). Hewitt (2011) stated that, “Canadian municipalities largely operate on a very pragmatic basis and in synchronicity with broad federal objectives-principally related to trade and economic interchange-as subnational units” (p. 28). Hewitt (2011) contends allowing cities and towns to participate in foreign ventures gives citizens a voice in international affairs, but municipal governments and bureaucrats lack the expertise for effective international participation. The FCM has been the national voice of municipal government for more than a century. Currently, the FCM (2014) is implementing a three-year long international relations framework that aims to enable and improve city-to-city cooperation. The FCM (2014) framework provides guidelines on the following four areas: policy influence, development cooperation, trade and investment promotion, and organizational effectiveness and efficiency (pp. 4-9)

### Success or Failure

Hewitt (2002) wrote directly about international cooperation between small cities. His article provided two case studies. One between Charlesbourg in Quebec with a population of 71,000 and Ovalle in Chile with a population of 85,000. The other partnership is between Kitimat in BC with a population of 11,000 and Riobamba in Ecuador with a population of 103,000. Hewitt (2002) identified five factors to determine the success of the partnering process:

i) A propensity to a common vision and to concrete goal-setting, ii) the establishment of strong bonds of personal friendship and of interaction on an egalitarian basis, iii) a commitment to a culture of continuity, iv) an ongoing commitment to self-assessment and evaluation, and v) the encouragement of public participation in partnership activities. (p. 231)

In all the above categories, the Charlesbourg and Ovalle partnership was strong except for public participation as it was moderate. In all the above categories, Kitimat and Riobamba was weak and only strong in the category of personal friendship and a culture of egalitarianism (Hewitt, 2002). The Charlesbourg and Ovalle partnership was deemed a success based upon this criteria, meanwhile the Kitimat and Riobamba was not so successful.



De Villiers (2005) stated many city-to-city partnerships fail. De Villiers (2009) provided the following perspective for these partnerships to succeed they needed an: enabling environment with national government policy and position, careful partner selection, community involvement, quality management with strong community leadership, planning, relationships, ongoing assessment and funding. M'Bassi (2004), De Villiers (2009), Buis (2009), and Bontenbal (2010) agree that capacity building is important to increase professionalism and facilitate relationships. Buis (2009) stated that successful factors for city-to-city cooperation include the support of both parties with joint ownership and an open discussion on motives; joint analysis of the problem; joint agreement upon strategy; clear purpose and results; joint steps in implementation; regular contact; reporting and report back; joint review of progress and reprioritizing when needed; and joint monitoring and evaluation.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

Past research on international cooperation in Canada has focused on large urban centres, with far less attention to small cities and towns. Research focused on international cooperation in small cities and towns is a new area for research. This is evident given the lack of published academic peer-reviewed and grey literature on this topic. For this literature review at the time, only two academic articles were located specifically focused on international cooperation in small cities and towns. Furthermore, only two resources from the grey literature review focused on the realities of small cities and towns. The two academic articles specifically dealt with city-to-city partnerships. The experiences of past city partnerships provide helpful insight that perhaps could be applied to international cooperation in small cities and towns. With globalization brings the opportunities and challenges for establishing international cooperation opportunities. Conversely, the grey literature provided more insights on small cities as actors of local development and as work environment. These two resources shed light on the facts that small cities play the role of linking local needs to international networks. Furthermore, differently sized cities provides a unique environment that affects local organizations and their work. They both highlighted the risk that small cities are facing and the need for policies to protect the need of small cities.

The next section presents the research findings based on qualitative research conducted in the Comox Valley, Kootenay Region, and Northern BC.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Our findings show that international cooperation NGOs and practitioners in small cities and town across BC contextualize their work around five major themes: connectedness, capacity building, local-global connection, tools and strategies for community action, and community challenges. Furthermore, there emerged from the themes and from parallel outreach conducted in-kind under BCCIC's contract with Global Affairs Canada (formerly the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development) a small set of promising practices that may be used by organizations in small cities and towns. This section describes each of the themes, includes relevant quotes from interviewees and focus group participants, and proposes some promising practices.

### Context of the Small City

Based on the analysis of the interview and focus group data, the context of the small city matters in terms of participants' perceptions of international cooperation and development issues. The overarching importance of place emerges as a key finding in terms of what it means to live in a smaller community during this era of globalization and influences all of the five themes discussed by participants. Similarly, the size and character of the city is perceived as influencing the nature of the work.

This valley is actually you know unusual I would say in Canada for the amount of global awareness we have. ... And a lot of people are aware in the valley. There is a bit of a counter culture in this area ... (Interview, Comox Valley)

I think that there're some things about Nelson, people here are very very earthy and they want to help and there's a connection that people want you know. The values of helping people to help themselves, as opposed to going there just to build a house ... There's a strong synergy in the community to do humanitarian work whether it is locally or abroad. And I think that comes from the values Nelson embraces. It happens because you create a culture, so Nelson has a different culture than in other communities. I think Nelson is way more proactive ... (Interview, Kootenay Region)

The data further demonstrate the need to listen to local voices grounded in the local community context. Interestingly, when asked about their international work in the context of a small city, several participants spoke of their experience in relation to the City of Vancouver.

I have lived in [big] cities and my personal experience in living in a [big] city is that it's much easier to remain anonymous and not get involved (Interview, Comox Valley)

It's more powerful I think it's much more powerful honestly than it would be in a big city. I feel that I have more voice within this smaller community than I would have in Vancouver ... I really do think so, I do think we do have this advantage. (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

We have a large geographical area. We are very resource rich. The population numbers are quite small. There are opportunities and still jobs. There is affordable housing. There are ways you can get involved in the community. You will not necessary have this in larger centers in Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto. There are services that are available and you can fairly quickly become more involved [in the community]. (Interview, Prince George)

I think there is a lot of opportunities in the North to find work and you know it's a lot more affordable Vancouver has priced itself out of the market ... a lot of people prefer to buy a house and own a house and not pay a million dollars. I know that I certainly don't want to pay a million dollars for a house. (Interview, Prince George)

The size of the city is factor when respondents spoke about the nature of their work in relation to working with the local media. For example, community leaders may get good coverage with the media in support of the promotion of their activities and in raising awareness on global issues. It was found that the size of the city may be an influencing factor, which might not get the same attention in a large urban centre.

I think I am sort of biased but I think it makes it easier. I see my daughter who has lived in Vancouver for the last you know 12 years. And quite often she is envious of the fact that I can get newspaper coverage. Sometimes on the front page. I mean, you know we have two newspapers here, it won't be long before there will just be one ... but they have been so good to us ... we just did this fundraiser for Syrian refugees and I was given a beautiful picture and the whole article was featured on the front page, at the last minute. We hadn't sold enough tickets and I basically said would you please [print] and I gave her the picture and she put that in and another article, and that really makes a difference. (Interview, Comox Valley)

Similarly, the promotion of local events in the context of a small city looks different:

Around town, I can hit all the main thorough fairs with 12 signs. (Interview, Comox Valley)

## Connectedness

Participants identified that individual and group connections are easier to make in small town settings and are often steeped in direct personal relationships that promote trust and partnerships.

### Importance of Connections

All respondents spoke very highly of the importance of connections and personal relationships in a small city. This is described in terms of human connections and relationships, and how close geographical proximity affects the work.

I think one thing you know that I just thought of is that in small community I'm known by a lot of people now, I have been here for you know 43 years ... (Interview, Comox Valley)

So in a small town you have those connections and it's just much easier to make connections with people even in terms of getting the products to them, you are not driving for hours (Interview, Comox Valley)

In a smaller community like this the people that are involved in international issues or progressive issues kind of know who each other are ... You know if there's an event, we see each other, I mean those kind of connections ... we gravitate ... (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

I think that the uniqueness is that in smaller communities there is more buy-in because people know each other and there's a deeper level of connection. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

It's a small town it's a smaller community so people know each other, they know what everyone's doing. So, what I'm getting at is that because we are a smaller community we get to know each other and we hear about it so that creates a kind of synergy ... (Interview, Kootenay Region)

People in a smaller community are way more connected with each other than in a large city. Those values rub off on each other. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

In a small town you usually know the people, and the connections may be easier to make. And often they are more informal. Just because it's a small town I know the sister of the siblings who started a group, I know her, and I know who her husband is. So there's all these connections ... I don't know if that automatically makes it better but I think in some ways it just makes it more comfortable when you see someone and you

know who they are. You know more about them. So, maybe there's more trust. At the same time sometimes that can backfire or if you know people and you know them personally. You know who they are, if they got fired from a job or they had a falling out with so-and-so. In small city, I think it's an advantage to know people personally. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

I guess the fact that we live in a small community people tend to know more about each other, so in terms of connections you know it happens when you talk to somebody ... in terms of networking that is a benefit living in a small community. I definitely feel that I have many more connections [in Prince George] I know many more people than where I lived in Ontario. I find people more welcoming here, they are more up to talking to you compared to people in big cities. (Interview, Northern BC)

### Personal Relationships

Personal relationships emerged across all community sites as an important finding in the context of small cities and establishing and maintaining connections between individuals.

I think you know people attract each other, right. So people start to come because of Hornby and Denman ... and so you ended up with you know a group of people. (Interview, Comox Valley)

You said the word relationship very early on and I think that's a fundamental piece. What everybody's searching is how to build relationships that are meaningful. (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

It's always about the relationship. It's always about a relationship. People have to feel like they're making a difference. And I have to feel like there's some kind of value and connection. And so I think it's about relationship. Relationships that people have. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

Friendly, I mean I go to a church and they are always raving about it and they support it ... mostly it is just spread by word of mouth. Like it started off with all of our friends coming and then our friends' friends and then more and more people hear about it and they come and people are always really impressed when they see the work that is being done in India. (Interview, Northern BC)

### Trust

Trust is found to be play an important role in personal relationships and community connections.

It's critical on many levels because if someone say they trust our ability to do programming for the film festival and we'll put something on an opening night that nobody has heard of and they come anyway. (Interview, Comox Valley)

I think sometimes international development work is contentious. Part of my job as a postsecondary educator is to take the role of a critical analyst on everything. Often you need this certain level of trust before you engage someone. If you are wanting to work with someone that may not have the same perspective as yourself. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

If you lose the support of your local people you are done, and the majority of our funds and fundraising comes from our local people. We have millions of people that donate money ... those are extreme high level of trust. (Interview, Northern BC)

Respondents spoke of the importance of networking and getting together in-person to share information. Opportunities for such personal interaction are valued in the context of small cities.

Our local BCCIC chapter did a great thing a couple of years ago where they had an evening where we ate and got together and all of these organizations in the small town who were engaged in international cooperation got together and just shared about what they were doing. I thought that was really great. So, you know, it's just sharing of ideas and networking. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

I think it is just connections right, because you are more able to talk to more people, and that person may know somebody and that person will connect you to other people that has some work or volunteering position and they can connect you with people who can support your organizations or the objectives of your organization or any international programs that you are working on. (Interview, Northern BC)

Building on the connections between individuals engaged in international cooperation activities is the role of community involvement. Respondents spoke about the many organizations, groups, and churches in which they are actively involved in the local community. Many spoke highly of the importance of community involvement and engagement, and how these activities contributing to building as sense of community.

There are quite a few things going on in the Valley like any night at the week you could see that there is a film at the college or at the theater downtown and an interest in global health and environmental issues. You can be busy seven nights of the week doing that here and that I think when we started there was not as much of that available. I think we are reinventing ourselves ... (Interview, Comox Valley)

The fact that we also involve and invite community groups to our social justice bazar brings a lot of people together and I think it builds a sense of community. (Interview, Comox Valley)

### Partnerships

One of the participants in the study reflected on a city-to-city partnership that was supported by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities at the time. Interestingly, the partnership was established between two small cities, one in BC and the other in Mozambique.

[A partnership] was engaging City staff so we did a trip over to Mozambique and visited their city operations and the challenging areas ... So we identified areas of cooperation in collaboration with those of the City officials ... I knew there were similarities [between the cities] like being in the mountains and working in the forestry industry. It has a kind of small city feel ... It felt manageable like we could actually accomplish something ... We had a number of technical exchanges of staffs back and forth and that was really beneficial and there was funding to support those exchanges. There was community involvement and a community representative selected to go with us. I do not use the term 'sister city' relationship ... This is not about the Mayor and the City Manager having fancy dinners together. It is about working people sharing their skills and learning from each other. I mean we learn too because at that time we did not have an engineer on staff and they did and so their engineer came here and actually bought us some stuff. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

While many respondents spoke of the value of partnerships there were no other formal partnerships discussed in the interviews or focus group discussion session.

We have lots of partnerships, yes, that's how we get things done in other countries and so on and so forth. Our goal is to work with the communities and help the communities do it for themselves I mean that's really the critical piece right? (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

### Volunteers

A number of participants spoke highly of the role of volunteers in their organization and work. In fact, volunteers are seen as playing a vital role in the local community.

I think part of it is we rely on a lot of volunteers ... We have teams of volunteers who are quite connected and they've developed ... We use a lot of volunteers also in the film festival (Interview, Comox Valley)

Prince George is known for volunteerism a lot of people in our community give back. (Interview, Northern BC)

The local volunteers are the face of the organization, we are the ones that stand up once a week and deliver messaging about our programs. There is an inherent level of trust ... it's you as a local person. So you do have to be educated to know what you are talking about, your materials have to be factual. I think it is imperative that we continue to train the local volunteers. (Interview, Northern BC)

Local organizers spoke of the challenges of relying on volunteers in order to sustain activities or operations over a long period of time. This is often necessary due to limited availability of funding.

I think we do have some challenges I think that unless we are able to pay some people to do some of the work especially organizing the film festival, I think we are going to slowly run out of steam relying on the same few people all the time. (Interview, Comox Valley)

Challenges ... I guess retaining volunteers, I don't want to say interest, but I think the interest is just that people have become busy with their own stuff. (Interview, Northern BC)

## **Capacity Building**

Education and raising awareness through public engagement, with post-secondary institutions playing a major role, creates opportunities at the local level.

### **Education**

The data reveals the importance of education in the work of international cooperation NGOs in small cities in BC. A number of activities have developed or evolved over time in order to support education about international issues of concern.

We got involved with fair trade in a way to do education. We had been watching all these films about what is happening around the world for a few years and we wanted a more direct connection. (Interview, Comox Valley)



Post-secondary institutions play a major role in raising awareness of international cooperation issues, and in creating opportunities at the local level. Often these activities are designed to support educational programs and initiatives. One of the participant's highlights some of the challenges experienced by post-secondary institutions outside large urban centers.

[We] are involved with international development at our college. It is a new role and the intent is to help facilitate international placements, [increase] faculty's global awareness and mobility. Another instructor and myself are going to talk about the barriers for rural colleges to mount international placements ... So when we think about a rural college and how it influences us on those global placements I am very intentionally not using the word international development because when we go to Nepal it is not that we are the experts at all. We are there to learn from the local people and get involved in children's nutritional programs and women's health programs primarily. That is the kind of work that we do. From my perspective, very intentionally attached to Nepali experts who work in the field year round ... So, when students come to me and say they want to go to Nepal to make a difference, I say, you know what, you are not going to have time. What will happen is you will go and you may even be transformed but I am not going to make promises to them. But really, it is about learning from the experts that are there on nutritional deficiencies and women's health issues in rural Nepal. So, where was I going with all of that? It is challenging to try to maintain and sustain an international placement in a small college. (Interview, Comox Valley)

The importance of education for project officers and those engaged in the work emerged as an area of importance for some participants.

And we are also learning as we go. We can't assume that we know all of this. The world is a very complex place and the issues are very complex and there is always something new to learn (Interview, Comox Valley)

### Raising Awareness

Community members spoke of their work in terms of raising awareness about international issues at the local level and using education as a means to support awareness raising.

In the community we hear about things as my partner likes to say it's kind of like shooting arrows in the air you don't know when they are going to come down but you know they are going to come down somewhere. (Interview, Comox Valley)

Awareness ... it's creating an awareness first because it's a very important element and that's what we spend a lot of time doing ... and connecting people to real issues around

the world and then finding ways to go in and help them meet some critical needs such as clean water. (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

The water campaign was interesting because you saw things happening on the university campus. For example, more people got behind it and they had awareness campaigns at the university using stickers on people binders and briefcases that lasted for months. The challenge is to keep that awareness going ... We have printing materials, posters, stickers, pamphlets and we give those freely to every member organization, or every chapter ... We give out different materials but we are getting push back on the proliferation of papers materials when we are talking about climate change and being green ... more people are downloading information. (Interview, Northern BC)

Community organizing tactics such as campaigns are used to raise awareness, but it is also recognized that diverse population groups may need alternate strategies. This was found to be the case with younger people.

### Younger People

A number of participants revealed the importance of engaging younger people in international cooperation and development work. A recently graduated university student shared her experience in joining a club engaged in international cooperation in order to access mentoring opportunities:

It's been really neat to be involved especially as a young person, just graduated from university. Not really knowing who to talk to and just joining a club where most of the people are older. Being young and walking into an organization where they welcome you and offer to mentor you. It's really difficult to get that kind of mentorship anywhere else without paying for it or being really involved for a long period of time. I am now able to go have coffee with people who are pretty big players in the community which has been really neat and I'd definitely recommend that for any young person trying to get their feet wet. (Interview, Comox Valley)

However, in another community, a respondent reported the challenges in engaging younger people in international cooperation work.

Young people are really scrambling to make a living here and probably everywhere they don't seem to have the time or they are mostly single parenting because their partners are working out of town. We've actually stopped trying to convince young people to come to our festival because a lot of young people we are finding don't watch films together, they watch them on their computers, or on Netflix. So instead of tearing our

hairs out trying to find films that will draw young people to our festival, we now work more on trying to do film festivals in the schools and we work with teachers to help do the programming. (Interview, Comox Valley)

A number of participants spoke about engaging younger people in relation to their role as students in several contexts.

### Students

For decades many post-secondary students have come to learn about international cooperation in their coursework and campus life. There is evidence from the data that this continues today, particularly in post-secondary institutions in small cities that offer international programs and opportunities such as international field placements.

I am in my third year at the University of Northern British Columbia, studying Economic International Studies with a minor in International Development Studies. I am here representing World University Services of Canada, the University of Northern British Columbia [UNBC] branch of that. Every university student who is enrolled at UNBC pays a small part of their tuition to sponsor one refugee student each year. So we coordinate that and take care of the refugee student while they are with us. We also do other campaigns. We are really involved in education. Next year we are hoping to have three refugee students, with an additional two from Syria. There is what we are working towards. (Focus Group, Northern BC)

What I do know about our population in a rural small community college? We have a non-typical population ... our population tends to be a little bit older. Our [student] population often has responsibilities such as caring for children. Students may be single parents, with responsibilities to employment. The more typical third year students in urban settings are younger, with less responsibilities, and perhaps more access to funds through parents. The other thing that is different is that [urban students] have bigger classes to choose from. (Interview, Comox Valley)

### University Link

The presence of post-secondary institutions is recognized as an influential force in the small cities in the study. Many individuals and volunteers spoke of their linkages to universities and colleges physically present, and how these ties support the development of opportunities for local residents and for students.

So they work with these universities and set up these partnerships in developing countries. And they send students to volunteer. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

At the University, we are much more aware of international issues ... we are much more connected and more aware of what is going on. There is an interplay between our local community and the broader international community. It is the university's role to seek opportunities to be part of international development. The first thing that comes in my mind is that if I wanted to get involved into such programs, I would come to the university and talk to staff about what they are doing and what is being offered. The university offers such a unique opportunity especially for students and people outside. There are so many opportunities and different clubs that are involved in international issues. There are just tons of stuff going on. There are so many opportunities that you do not even know about ... Definitely lots of professors are doing great things and there is opportunity to help people get involved. Even though we are remote, Prince George, it is so nice to see people talking about international issues or economic issues. That is really exciting for me to see. (Interview, Northern BC)

### **Local-Global Connection**

Participants stressed that local definitions of international development are influenced by local issues and a local interpretation of the role social justice plays in how the connection is understood.

### **Meaning of International Development**

Based on the participants' responses there are different understandings associated with the contested term 'international development.'

Ideally [international development] means to me that people wherever they are, are able to develop their own communities in a sustainable way based on what is best for them and that they are in control of that development. It does not mean that somebody from the North is coming in and deciding what is best for people in the Global South. It does not mean coming in and extracting all their resources and not involving them and not benefitting the local communities or in fact harming the local communities such as Canadian mining industries all over the world ... International development means that we are aware of what's happening around the world and try to have a positive impact no matter where we live. (Interview, Comox Valley)

When you are thinking about rural international development from my lens, that is one influencing factor. But I would not call it international development. It is more opportunities to increase your global knowledge ... The word international versus global to me is very different. International is more about borders, like international being country focused as opposed to a broader awareness that we live in a global community as opposed to one with borders ... I just kind of always react to the word international development, I think partly because international development has a business focus ... There is an industry around international development. (Interview, Comox Valley)

I think the opportunity to listen to them and actually hear what they have to share. I'll give you an example, people get frustrated about international development and it seems like their chasing their tails for over 50 years. I mean you know there's some progress and then they fall back, but really it's not a simple pragmatic solution all the time often times it is a cultural sort of barrier that keeping people from getting where we would like them to go ... (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

One of the things about the Sustainable Development Goals is this inter-relationship of the various goals ... Potable water has a direct relationship to gender equality ... I think what is unique about this community and other small communities is there is a layering and there is an interconnectedness of a number of social justice issues at the same time. You don't just talk about one issue in any context, they are usually layered on top of each other and people have their fingers in two or three of those issues ... They're not just involved with Amnesty or the Stephen Lewis Foundation. (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

I just know that some projects are a kind of charity model in my opinion. Organizations [that do not] really come from that social justice perspective. They are much more focused on charity ... I think sometimes they have important limitations. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

### Local-Global Link

A number of educators in the sample identified an interest in making connections between the local and global in terms of their applied work in the field of international cooperation.

I think in a theoretical sense I want my students to pay attention to those policies. I want them to pay attention to, for example, recognizing the changes in refugee's access to health benefits for example. I want students to know how policy will influence the individuals that they meet in their day to day lives. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

We can very easily find examples of poverty and homelessness ... In the downtown core ... We often bring it to the home context. (Interview, Northern BC)

### Link to Larger Groups

Several participants spoke of their ability to leverage the work of larger organizations and associations in support of their activities at the local level. The link to larger organizations with an established reputation can provide legitimacy and credibility.

We work with other organizations like the Council of Canadians or Amnesty (Interview, Comox Valley)

And of course the Stephen Lewis Foundation has links right across Canada and all of those people pool into the same place and I think that's makes it easy to be a fundraiser is that you know on the ground it's really taken care of well ... the ethics and the responsibility is really clear (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

And Canada world youth has been good because Canada World youth doesn't go to Vancouver. So another point is this, I'm glad I'm thinking of this, you got me thinking. Canada world youth goes to little communities. Both my son and daughter were involved in Canada World Youth, and went overseas ... And they got involved because I had been involved. If I hadn't lived in a small town, I wouldn't have even known about it. (Interview, Comox Valley)

There was a group called the United Nations Association. I think it still exists. They funded us to go around to schools and talk to kids about our experience and the children's life in Mozambique and that kind of stuff. It was really great. In many ways, we felt like that was the most important work that we did was when we came back in terms of talking about what was going on in Southern Africa. We hosted visitors from South Africa and from Mozambique. There is always a dance happening. Again, now, there is no money. So, it does not happen. Social media is great. But, actually sitting with someone and talking to them is so much better. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

Today I am representing the United Nation Association of Canada, the Prince George Branch. Some of the work that we have done here locally is to increase awareness of the work of the United Nations, setting up to do different development goals, hosting events to increase awareness and try to bring in speakers and professionals with international experiences to share with us. We are a small community we do not necessary have those professional regularly available to us. (Focus Group, Northern BC)

## Local Issues

I think we have a significant talent in Prince George and in British Columbia to offer the services and to help relief [efforts] in natural disaster. For example, areas that are under developing that may need some assistance in different areas such as education and resources to put on courses for workers to train healthier professionals, social work professionals, whatever it might be ... I think we have an obligation within our communities to try to offer those services and try to increase our capacity ... Locally, what we are trying to do is to educate folks about how they can use their particular talents, their time and their money to benefit the broader community. (Interview, Northern BC)

It's easier for people to connect with something when there is a local aspect to it and people can connect to international things but I find it's easier for someone to connect with something that's in their backyard rather than for somebody across the globe right. (Interview, Northern BC)

## **Tools and Strategies for Community Action**

Participants stressed that tools such as the internet and social media, community activities and fundraising play big roles in supporting and amplifying international cooperation efforts in small towns.

## Social Media

Respondents highlighted the importance of the internet in supporting their international cooperation efforts in small towns:

So before I came here this morning I used social media, Internet and Skype. I had 2.5 hours of conversation with young people I am working with [overseas]. So I'm in contact with people pretty well everyday [using technology]. (Interview, Comox Valley)

We have access to information that everyone else does. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

Because of all the new technologies I think there is an opportunity for more awareness with young people and old people. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

Similarly, another participant identified that social media may be useful in engaging younger people:

Some children are really not connected [to international cooperation] ... if I did more I think social media might have lot to do with it ... ways of organizing traditionally aren't calling to young people. (Interview, Comox Valley)

Certainly in this community the internet has allowed young people to be educated about topics from abroad ... We do what we do and I mean we educate them from the university but I think that there are people who have international understanding and international orientations and that comes mainly from the media and being aware of these sort of things ... the media has been there a long time. (Interview, Northern BC)

That is great, so you can see people are becoming more exposed to information because of the advent of technology and access to information that is facilitated by technology ... (Interview, Northern BC)

### Social Justice

Social justice as an area of practice and interest also emerged in the study.

The people I see mostly are all activists pretty much anyway. So they all have their own causes. Everybody you know [is] sort of like I have the hat for this cause and people wear hats for different causes [in this community] ... (Interview, Comox Valley)

It's always about justice, always about making a better world, about a fair world (Interview, Comox Valley)

I think we're all trying to create a world with justice and we are trying to build an analysis. So that people understand what are the underlying issues that are creating injustice. And also analysis of what we are doing that impacts and is creating a better world and what we are doing collectively and individually is people who in Nelson. What we are doing that actually is creating a better world and what's hampering. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

### Activities

There are a number of activities identified in support of international cooperation such as fundraising, distribution of promotional material, community organizing, and advocacy.

We do not manage any projects, but we provide funding to help support projects ... We have worked on joint projects in health and diabetes ... (Interview, Comox Valley)



You know I have bought thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of posters over the years and spread them all over ... and I have sold hundreds and hundreds of books on wonderful topics ... (Interview, Comox Valley)

Somebody has to be the organizer, someone has to be the spokesperson and that's what I am. I'm just a promoter you know. I talk about it, bring it forward, get people excited, and provide information. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

Coming to Prince George and seeing that people are actually lobbying ... it is so empowering to see ... that people care about so many things. You do not even realize how many groups are working towards eliminating poverty and addressing gender equality. ... You do not realize how many great organization are fighting on a local level and that will definitely impact the international level as well. (Focus Group, Northern BC)

I am with a Christian based NGO that is operating throughout Canada, and our mandate has always been to provide international development projects overseas as an extension of the church and to educate Canadians about issues that are of concern overseas. Most of the work is done by volunteers across Canada and supported by paid staff to do the international development work overseas, or to supervise that ... [We run campaigns] delivered locally in our community, and to raise funds to support those projects. (Interview, Northern BC)

## **Community Challenges**

While participants were overwhelmingly positive in their feedback about the positive aspects of being involved in international work from a small city context, several participants also pointed out significant challenges, such as feeling cut off from resources and opportunities due to their size and location.

### Isolation

The size and geographic location of the city may present as a challenge for some engaged in international work. Feelings of isolation and the lack of opportunities to connect with international projects are reported.

I'm incredibly isolated. I actually was one of the people that helped set up the Comox Valley Global Awareness Network and I did it in part because I really hoped that it would

provide a way for me to engage with more people who were doing really in-depth, hands-on, grassroots-level work. (Interview, Comox Valley)

Well, I think in a small community context we have fewer opportunities to connect with international projects or experiences. And I think we don't necessarily have connections with organizations that are really at the cutting edge ... (Interview, Kootenay Region)

There are churches that are involved, but lots of people do not want anything to do with churches. Their work and figure they are just proselytizing. Some are and some are not. Who is taking the leadership on international development now? (Interview, Kootenay Region)

I think it is really important because the smaller areas don't seem to have a lot of support like you would have in larger centers like Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, and Toronto [who] have a lot of resource people to help. If you are in a smaller place if you are working on some projects someplace else you might be one of the few people where your other members are in other parts of the country. It's more challenging for meetings and all. Whereas if you are in a larger city with more volunteers then you are getting more support. (Interview, Prince George)

Several respondents spoke of the physical isolation given their geographic location in a small city, and specifically how this affects air travel and mobility:

I think, one of our challenges is just travel. Our nearest international airport is in Spokane; I mean that's in another country. And the nearest Canadian airport is in Kelowna, it's a pretty small airport. The nearest big airport is Vancouver, which is 8 hours away by car. And even our local airport has a lot of problems in the winter because of weather cancellations. So those things are problems of the small town. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

Prince George is quite separated from Vancouver. It takes a long time to get there if you are going to drive or fly. It is kind of hard for Prince George; especially since our club is going to the International Forum. In Canada, you have to send two people to Ottawa, and it is so much money to fly to Ottawa. But we can overcome our geographical challenges. (Focus Group, Northern BC)

### Lack of Resources

Several participants commented that the biggest challenge they experience is burnout given the lack of resources to sustain operations in the long-term. This is increasingly an issue for a

number of small organizations located in smaller communities given the lack of sustained funding to support projects and activities.

I think that on the monetary side there's a belief or a feeling that there's an urbanization of moneys there's an allocation of moneys from the government that's inordinately spent in urban centers rather than rural centers ... this is why you're always asking for more money from locals because we're a one stop shop here ... we don't have those sorts of services supported here financially so that's why we take more ownership (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

I think the biggest challenge is burnout, to remain fresh. Fundraising is so challenging ... the federal government could say this is how they could streamline the organization ... So if I want to do something in Haiti, I have to do all this fund-raising ... You can burnout, that's the biggest challenge to remain fresh ... (Interview, Kootenay Region)

But you know it needs to be sustained. It's hard to sustain things like that. You have a good meeting and then things drop off unless there is someone working at that. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

### Lack of Diversity

The lack of diversity in BC's small cities was noted by one of the participants as a challenge:

One of the challenges for me living in this lovely but rural and a bit remote community is that it has a very cosmopolitan mindset, people have come here from many parts of the world and many people are educated with creative ability. But we don't have any substantial population of people of color ... [there is a need for] wider diversity in this community ... (Interview, Kootenay Region)

### Making the Local-Global Link

One of the challenges highlighted by a respondent is about engaging people locally when the international cooperation work is done overseas.

One of the challenges as an organization at the local level, is how to engage people locally because our work is overseas and done by those who live overseas and supported by staff from our head office. So what is a person in Prince George doing, either educating or raising money, and not everybody wants to raise money, but not everybody is comfortable educating, so it is a challenge to find ways to engage people in those activities. So having movie nights or rice and bean meals and things like that are

key, but it takes a tremendous amount of energy to motivate and to organize at the local level because you can't organize that from head office. (Interview, Northern BC)

### Funding and Fundraising

The issue of fundraising emerged in all three communities given the need for resources to sustain activities. The amount of time required for fundraising, the lengthy and complicated funding applications required by government, and competition for funding, are found to be some of the major challenges experienced by participants. A number of strategies for successful fundraising in the context of the small city are identified.

I find that smaller communities are doing really important fundraising and that sort of thing it can be really difficult to ask people again and it's the same people that are always contributing ... because we find we're always tapping the same generous people and businesses ... there's a finite number of businesses and the small businesses get hit up a lot and the big stores tend not to feel so obliged. (Focus Group, Comox Valley)

Now everybody spends all their time fundraising, right? All the good work we could be doing. No, no. We have to be fundraising instead. I do not get it, right? This is a conservative thing. This is politics. The scarcity. We have so many resources. It just means that the energy for doing positive good things is now being used to raise money, to try to get you to do something, to get it done and to want you to get the money in place. I grew up in the 1970s when Prime Minister Trudeau [launched] all these great opportunities for youths and for local initiative projects. As a young person, you have to experience community development, get a little bit money for doing it and really learn how to contribute. Well, I do not have money for that any more. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

So when we went to apply [for funding] it was that thick literally, the application and the stuff we had to do. We have nobody with the capacity to do it. Unless you are a big organization and you have a multi-million dollar project applying for the money from the government is absolutely a waste of time. You cannot do it; volunteer organizations cannot do it. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

But with my experience, with grant writing, it's a secret little society of people not helping anyone else. Why? Because you tell them about your grant and they are going to apply for your grant. You get screwed. Even with non-profits, I have a friend that started in non-profits, I'd give her advice but now I look at her and see that she is another competition in town. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

When we put on fundraiser we have a built in audience because we know so many people. So that's one thing that's different [in a small city]. I think if you live in a big city and you think that you are working with such a larger community and it should be easier. Some ways I think it is more difficult. When we put on fundraising, we are guaranteed to have a minimum of 100 people pay 20 bucks for a dinner we put on. So, you know with not too much effort we could raise thousands of dollars. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

One of the major problems with NGOs is the lack of connection between local folks and the people that are providing the finances. And so when people donate large sums of money, let's say to organizations like the Red Cross or Oxfam the money goes into the pot and then it just gets skewed. When you have small communities I actually go to the place and [people] can see where their dollars are spent, and how they're spent. It's significantly different. The problem with international humanitarian work is a focus on "this is what you need" instead of taking the time to collaborate with the local folks and give them ownership and letting them do what they need. And so that's our method. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

Funding constraints appear to challenge the availability of human resources in terms of paid staff in community development.

I think we do have some challenges I think that unless we are able to pay some people to do some of the work especially organizing the film festival, I think we are going to slowly run out of steam relying on the same few people all the time. (Interview, Comox Valley)

Obviously it is difficult to maintain activities when you do not have the funding and the institutional support. (Interview, Kootenay Region)

Given the challenging environment facing international cooperation and international development, it is not surprising to hear that individuals and organizations in small cities report experiencing difficulties with fundraising.

#### Lack of Professional Contact Opportunities

Other reported challenges include the need for professional contact opportunities to connect with experienced practitioners in the field.

I need to connect with people who have also worked for fifteen years on the ground in another country. I really appreciate the work of the college, but there's a real difference between academics involved in international development and on the ground

development. I'm so hungry for opportunities to connect with people who understand the complexity and the challenge that I don't have anybody to talk to. So, thank god for Facebook because I can [connect] with all the people I work with, all the staff and the NGO's that are on the ground ... they all have mobile phones and they all use Facebook. (Interview, Comox Valley)

### **Promising Practices**

While the project was interested in learning about any innovative or promising practices in the area of international development and cooperation, there were few responses on this subject. One of the respondents shared the following around needs-based programming:

We look into the needs of the community and then going from their needs to implementation. I mean I don't know if that is innovative but you know we try not to just bring programs or events to the community but instead look at the needs of the community and what the community is like. We prefer to create events and programs based on the needs of this community. (Interview, Northern BC)

There was also a recognized need for greater cross-sectoral collaboration for achieving international development as well as a push to include youth and intergenerational collaboration in small town and city efforts.

Internet tools, social media, community activities, and fundraising partnerships with larger organizations were all seen as valuable tools to amplify the sometimes limited resources of small city NGOs.

Furthermore, in September 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to tackle the root causes of environmental, social, and economic inequality in order to achieve a more peaceful and sustainable world. Parallel to this research project, BCCIC conducted an extensive series of 29 roundtable consultations across 5 regions in BC, meeting with over 400 individuals around the themes of Canadian and international sustainability. We found that participants in our roundtables – often individuals and organizations in small towns and cities – supported the use of the SDGs as a common language tool for linking, contextualizing and positioning the work of Canadian civil society organizations.

### **CONCLUSION**

This exploratory qualitative study considers the experiences of civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and related stakeholder groups engaged in international cooperation activities in three small cities in BC. Given the challenges facing international

development as a field and area of practice, it is important to learn from the experiences of those most affected and active at the local level. The study involved individuals, organizations, and groups who are working in the context of small cities and towns in the field of international cooperation yet have traditionally been excluded from research about their experiences.

The lack of literature on international cooperation and international development in small cities and towns serves as evidence of the novel research topic that is considered in this report. The literature review provides insight into a number of themes in two areas: 1) Non-government organizations (NGOs) on topics related to social justice, geography, funding, strengths, and changes; and 2) City-to-city cooperation with a focus on foreign policy, and success or failure. There is a need for further research that investigates the small city context across provinces in order to inform programming and partnerships.

A thematic analysis of the qualitative data generated multiple themes, and this report focuses on the perceptions of international cooperation and development issues by those engaged in the work at the local level. The context of the small city matters and the importance of place is a key finding in terms of what it means to work on international cooperation and development activities. Similarly, the size and character of the city is perceived as influencing the nature of the work. The importance of connections and relationships between and among those active in formal and informal activities emerged across all three communities. Issues of trust and partnership appear to be related to connections and relationships.

Volunteers are seen as playing a vital role in the local community yet there are challenges in relying on volunteers in order to sustain activities over time. Many organizations support education and raising awareness about international issues of concern. There is an interest among some groups to further engage younger people and students, and many organizations have established links to post-secondary institutions when they are present in small cities.

Similar to the literature review, the perspectives of the respondents in the study demonstrate different understandings and meaning associated with the contested term 'international development'. Educators in particular seem to prefer to highlight local-global issues while other individuals are engaged in work that support larger organizations or associations at the local level through fundraising.

The importance of the internet and social media in supporting international cooperation in small cities and town was highlighted, and there is interest in using new technologies to further engage younger people. Social justice as an area of practice and interest may serve as a motivating influence in being engaged in the work. Several activities were identified in support of international cooperation such as fundraising, distribution of promotional material, community organizing, and advocacy.

The size and geographic location of the city may present as a challenge for some engaged in international work. Feelings of isolation and the lack of opportunities to connect with international projects are reported. Funding constraints appear to challenge the availability of human resources in terms of paid staff to support community development. One of the biggest challenges reported is burnout given the lack of resources to sustain operations in the long-term. This is described as an increasing concern for a number of organizations located in smaller communities given the lack of sustained funding to support projects and activities. The amount of time required for fundraising, the lengthy and complicated funding applications required by government, and competition for funding, are considered to be key challenges experienced by those working in the context of small cities and towns. A number of strategies for successful fundraising in the context of the small city are identified, and opportunities for professionals to connect with experienced practitioners in the field.

Overall, the results of the study contribute to a better understanding of the work, understandings, and challenges faced by international cooperation NGOs in small cities and towns. The project is significant because it provides unique insight from the diverse perspectives within the international cooperation sector, and the voices of volunteers and individuals in smaller communities. The results aim to contribute to a broader dialogue on the role and contributions of those working in the context of small cities and towns, and to share their perspectives and experiences with others.

It is anticipated that a number of stakeholders will be interested in the results of this study including government policy-makers, education and training institutions, community organizations, NGOs, development practitioners, and members of the general public.

This research, including knowledge mobilization, took place from September 2014 to August 2016.

## **Research Outcomes**

The research outcomes of the project are:

- 1) To increase knowledge and awareness of Canadian international cooperation activities in small cities and towns deemed to be of priority in Canada, from the social sciences perspectives;
- 2) To build research capacity by involving student research assistants, educators, and practitioners in a research project related to international cooperation; and



- 3) To increase the application of research knowledge in decision-making and promising practices in the public and private sectors, communities, and civil society through diverse knowledge mobilization activities throughout the project.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

There are a number of suggestions for further research:

- A mixed methods study with a larger sample size across several regions or provinces would provide more robust results in terms of understanding the dynamic of international cooperation in small cities and towns.
- Interviewing Southern partners who are engaged in collaboration and partnerships with individuals and community members in small cities and town is recommended.
- A study on the motivations, and challenges, of younger people to become engaged in international cooperation and international development activities is needed.
- Research on the relationship between post-secondary institutions and international cooperation sector is needed in small cities and town.
- Research on new technologies and social media in supporting international cooperation activities and efforts in small cities is need.
- Further research on the challenges experienced by those engaged in international cooperation work due to the size and geographic location of the city is needed. This could include the issue of fundraising and resources to sustain activities.

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